

NATALIE BRAND

**FROM**  
**CRIMSON**  
**TO** FINDING GOSPEL  
JOY AT CALVARY

**WHITE**



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"Tattooed in my mind, images I can't take back  
And dressed in all white when my soul was still black

Been sick to my stomach in a prison of regret  
Felt so full of shame that I wished that I was dead  
Until I realised that somebody paid the price  
The gift was free for me, but He had to give His life

Jesus paid it all  
All to Him I owe  
Sin had left a crimson stain  
He washed it white as snow"

Forrest Frank, "Jesus Paid It All (Worthy of the Price)",  
(2023).



## Gospel Bliss

Mr O was a bit of a Gandalf. Tall. Quick-witted. Sharp-eyed. *Super intimidating*. But his craft wasn't wizardry but preaching. Mr O was an awesome preacher.

Yet what I remember most about him was an off-the-cuff comment he made during a lecture. Mr O's words still resound in my head twenty years later, stirring a sort of uncomfortable hope. He peered at the class through his large double-bridge-framed glasses and challenged us in the tone of a well-seasoned preacher:

"More Christians need to dance in their kitchen over their salvation. Do you ever dance in yours in praise for what Christ has done for you?"

He pushed his glasses up his aquiline nose and gave a wide grin. "I dance in mine all the time!"

Sitting in class, I refused to cringe at the mental image of this eccentric professor dancing his heart out in front of the kitchen sink. I didn't want to be a Michal, who despised King David as he danced before the Lord (2 Sam. 6:16). But it struck me then, and still does, that Mr O is painfully spot on. Many of us need

to grow in our gospel revelry. To glory daily in Christ and his Calvary-victory; every pore of our person praising the Lord for his astounding grace.

If I truly believed this stuff – the eternal gravity, the cosmic weight, the ultimate freedom of Christ’s saving work for me – wouldn’t I dance all the time?

Now I’m not talking about “getting down” when the worship band is up. True gospel revelry is not jiggling and jiving in the pew or raising our hands at the key change. This is about the real deal when it comes to worship – Christian joy fuelled by gospel not by beat. Sure, we love a worship fest! But how is your worship when everything is stripped away?

No music.

No atmosphere.

No crafted cues or rows of other people.

Just you, alone before the Lord. Leaping and dancing like King David in your most mundane space. Soul-thirsting, flesh-fainting for the Living God (Ps. 63:1).

This is gospel revelry. *This is gospel bliss.*

### Excuses to a Grasshopper

Two decades have passed since Mr O’s challenge, and my own Jiminy-Cricket-of-a-conscience frequently whispers in my ear: “You talk, teach and write about this stuff all the time! But you never dance in your kitchen!”

I death-stare him from the corner of my eye. “I’m a Brit. I’m reserved.”

*But that’s not it.*

Jiminy lifts one tiny eyebrow. I eye roll. “Okay, okay! I don’t dance at the kitchen sink because the dirty dishes are screaming

to be loaded! LAY OFF!”

*But that's not quite it either.*

Now you may not be the dancing type. Yet I'm sure we'd all say that we want to worship with abandon. To experience a deep joy in Christ like Mr O and King David. But I've a hunch that the reason many of us miss this gospel bliss lies deeper than our personality or dirty dishes.

*So why does gospel revelry elude us?*

### Shame Can't Dance

Let's face it: It's hard to rejoice in our gospel freedom when we continue to succumb, submit, surrender to Bully Sin. Sin – ours and other people's – is our daily reality. Its sour aftertaste lingers in our mouths. Every hour we witness afresh sin tearing up people, marriages, homes and even the planet. It's near impossible to joy in freedom from sin when every day we are harassed and demoralised by it.

And then there's shame – sin's stalking shadow. For many of us gospel revelry is out of the question because shame is eating away at us from within. *Shame* – that internal blush. That replaying of mistakes long past. Ed Welch defines it:

“Shame is the deep sense that you are unacceptable because of something you did, something done to you, or something associated with you. You feel exposed and humiliated ... Guilt can be hidden; shame feels like it is always exposed.”<sup>1</sup>

If anything is going to stop us from dancing over our salvation in Christ, it's this. Shame is a humiliation etched

into our identity. It mars, even mutilates, the image we see in the mirror. Shame distorts our true Creator-image-bearing identity. Whether because of abuse from another or the heavy baggage of past regrets.

And yet for some shame isn't about the past but the present. It is that self-loathing of the figure, face or failure in the mirror. It makes us want to hide away forever. To not be looked upon! There are plenty of women out there – sisters in Christ – who see themselves as unlovely, unworthy, used. And as Ed Welch said, *exposed*.

In need of clothing.

In need of robing.

Chuck the tap shoes or moon boots in the wardrobe with the skeletons, the pain, the scars of the past. Shame can't dance.

### The Unloved Won't Dance

For her seventh birthday our youngest daughter begged for a hooped ballgown. You know the sort: *Plastic. Faux. Scrub clean only*.

I found the perfect one. It was sky-blue with a matching cloak trimmed with fur, tiara and wand. On her birthday my husband (the ultimate girl-dad) put on the waltz from Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*, and I announced her loudly as Princess Arabella of the Far Isles or something.

It was classic *The Slipper and the Rose*. She swanned in, soaking up the adoration of her father. Tom was the perfect handsome prince. Dancing in another world, I watched my little girl twirl, loop and spin under the adoring eyes of her father. She danced with abandon. It wasn't so much the dress, the music or the crown. It was simply her enjoyment of her father's delight.



Yet a wise friend of mine told me that most Christians don't believe that they are the subject of the Father's delight. Her insight was a rather painful punch in the gut! I realised this unbelief, error, mis-theology was something I had both harboured and buried away. Her words unearthed the reality that I simply didn't believe that the Father delighted in me.

*Isn't God's delight something we earn?*

Only when we experience the loving eyes of the Father are we safe to dance. For we can only delight in God when we know he delights in us. Yet many of us are so busy tripping over ourselves, our past failures, our present guilt, we forget to lift our eyes to God and see what kind of Father he is. Though every chapter, corner and crevice of Scripture declares the unabashed love of God for his people, we skew our understanding of him. Jen Wilkin has it, "Despite knowing the grace of salvation, many of us still suspect that God is perpetually scowling reproachfully in our direction."<sup>2</sup>

Wired by a world that defines love with prenuptial agreements and mutual back scratching, we form in our minds an unbiblical God who could never delight in us. This fabrication of a divine scowl has certainly kept me from gospel bliss. Have you too missed out on gospel joy because you can't accept the unreserved delight of the Father?

### Too Busy to Dance

And in all this I think the chief reason we don't dance with Mr O is because we are too busy saving ourselves. Could it be that this lies at the root of even those things we have considered above?

We strive, strive, strive!

*Do, do, do!*

We must justify ourselves. Or at least, justify Christ's justification of us. Humanity wants to save itself. It always seeks approval. So, we turn God-given gifts into ways of stacking up brownie points.

We do more. Serve more. We work to remove the divine scowl.

If we build a local church ministry from scratch, singlehandedly keeping it going for years then *kudos* with God.

If we make it through creche on a Sunday morning with both our life and our sanity – though we hate every second of it – then cue a smiley face.

We make the cut when our children are the smartest both at the school gate and in the academic reports. *\*Fist Pump\**

But if we fail to deliver our kids to school on time, branded as the “always late”, dressed in faded hand-me-downs; if our 5K time pushes past thirty minutes as we hit our fiftieth birthday; or we never make that promotion though the whole office knows we always go for it ...

*Frown.*

Personally, I know I have a performance-based theology when I feel my heart hit my toes as I scroll to the Insta-Mum who is successfully raising chickens and homeschooled children dressed in homespun linen, while balancing a perfectly baked sourdough on her head.

So, we scrub our equivalent of the monastery floor. Even as Christians, our flesh runs from grace. Cracking open our Bibles because we know what's expected of us. Agreeing to serve in a new church ministry even though there is no space in our schedule. *We can't let God down.* Maybe I'm wrong but

sometimes I think our to-do lists can quickly turn into racking up security with God:

Church rotas✓  
Bible study leadership✓  
Hospitality✓  
Missions Tithing✓  
Housework✓  
Exercise✓

It seems because self-justification is our quickest and deepest impulse, we can turn almost anything into an opportunity for it.

*Na! Surely not!* We labour away in churches obscure. We're the first to open up the building on Sundays and midweek. Always the last to leave.

We're the biblically sound. The well-taught. The well-read. We're book-buying, conference-lanyard-wearing evangelicals! We confess a mighty divine rescue.

But Richard Lovelace states that only a fraction of professing Christians actually rest on the completed work of Christ in their lives. He suggests most of us only hold to it theoretically. We may confess belief in justification in Christ. But in practice we think our works are enough.<sup>3</sup>

We are bent on self-rescue.

*Gospel bliss? Bah! Humbug! I'm too busy ... Joy is for the idle.*

Then There Are Those Dishes

Perhaps it would be unfair to say that our lack of gospel revelry always boils down to deep-set spiritual issues and

misunderstandings. Much of the time it is the demands of life that distract us. Our responsibilities, appointments, emails, chores ...

For sure, life is full. Anxieties rumble away within us. We are consumed with concern for family and friends, for little people (if we have them) or little people who are now big people. Every morning, we crawl inside our spinning wheels – whether work, motherhood or ministry – and we give it all we’ve got. By the end of the day, we’re fried!

*Deep fried!*

The weight of the world has sucked us dry. And if your pyjamas are like mine, they don’t always wait until dusk to emerge.

Now, I could go down the Martha line. I could say we’re too busy running around like headless poultry and not choosing to sit at the feet of Jesus.

But I won’t. Of course, the challenge is valid. But I reckon some of us are sick of being told we are Marthas. And let’s be fair to Martha – who leaves her house of mourning to meet with Jesus and declare his death-defeating power – she is hardly the embodiment of a life distracted from joy in Jesus (Jn. 11:20-22). But we can ask some honest questions of ourselves:

Do I concentrate more on my *to-do list* than on the one who is the worthiest, most beautiful and most satisfying treasure in all the world?

Do I choose the endless churning of this world’s anxieties instead of tethering my concerns to Christ and resting in him who is my Rest?

Do I choose the beauty of my own home instead of longing like the psalmist for the lovely dwelling place of God (Ps. 84)?

Do I make a beeline for the coffee machine at 7am on a Monday morning, trusting in caffeine to get me through the week, instead of him who is “my chosen portion and my cup” (Ps. 16:5)?

I think for many of us our lack of Christian joy is just something else we feel guilty about. We want to be gospel revellers but when we search through our habits, our priorities, even our affections, we come to recognise that there are plenty of things we cherish before Christ.

Friend, are you too painfully aware that every day you make decisions that cultivate the killjoys, choosing things that distract and even *extract* joy in Jesus?

### Killing the Killjoys

No matter which of these reasons resonate with you, we need to kill these killjoys. They must die if we are to worship with abandon before the Lord.

Did you clock that each killjoy centres on us? *What we do. Who we are.*

This is no surprise really. Errors and half-gospels fester like gangrene when we make salvation and the Christian faith about us.

But worshipping with utter abandon, like Mr O and King David, means learning to revel in the full gospel. It means growing in gospel clarity, which is the aim of this book as we centralise the cross. Because gospel bliss is found on a hill

outside Jerusalem. There we find endless joy as all killjoys are burnt away. They can't survive in the shadow of the cross.

As women in Christ, we never outgrow the cross. It is our life. Our breath. We need always to live in its view. It is my hope that these crisp, white pages are the space you need to spend time there.

Imagine Calvary was just outside town. Let's go and park up at the base of the hill for a while. As we climb Calvary together, we are going to witness Christ's crimson blood purchasing us white robes. To journey to the core of the gospel, is to find the Father's pardoning justification and Christ's gift of righteousness burning at its centre. It is in these twin truths that the greatest freedom and joy available to humanity is found.

The prophet Isaiah knew this:

"I will greatly rejoice in the LORD;  
My soul shall exult in my God,  
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation;  
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness."  
(Is. 61:10)

In the following pages we're going to see that it is being clothed forever in this Christ-garment that removes shame-induced lies and distortions in the mirror. It is this biblical reality of being covered in King Jesus by faith that corrects our vision from divine scowls to fatherly smiles. And the fact that we are dressed in the robe of righteousness from a victorious, beautiful Saviour means our self-righteous and distracted hearts can rest hard, cherish Christ and worship with abandon in the kitchen.

My friend, when you finally close this book – whether you've

read alone or in a group – I pray that by God's grace your killjoys would have burnt away under the power of the cross. And that you will have grasped much more of the eternal gravity, the cosmic weight, the ultimate freedom of Christ's saving work for you.